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Survival of the Crucifixion: Traditions of Jesus within Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism and Paganism

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INTRODUCTION

The empty tomb on Easter morning and subsequent appearances of Jesus to his disciples and to a few others have provided some novelists, or writer-scholars, with incentive to explore the possibility of his survival of the crucifixion.¹ This incentive has been furthered by the lack of documented examples of resurrection other than that supposed for Jesus first by Paul and then by the early Christian church. Unknown to many, however, is that various independent scholars have also postulated that Jesus survived the crucifixion for the same reasons. Also not well known is how widespread and credible the traditions are that point to Jesus, after surviving the crucifixion, having traveled with a few others through Anatolia and thence eastward to northern India and the Kashmir region. Here these topics will be summarized and consolidated so that open-minded, questioning Christians can better explore the roots of their faith and understand how thoroughly Christian authorities over the centuries have ignored, suppressed and belittled the unthinkable evidence that could overturn their faith.

RESUSCITATION HYPOTHESES

Although the various Gospel accounts of Jesus' appearances to his disciples following the crucifixion contain a large number of inconsistencies and discrepancies, this is only to be expected if the Gospel writers, especially the first one, needed to edit an original account of Jesus having survived the crucifixion into an account in which he had appeared in a resurrected form. The various scholars' hypotheses will then vary due to the differing weights they may attach to the different Gospel accounts, and due to their differing religious backgrounds.

The Ahmadiyyas. This non-orthodox branch of Islam was founded in the 19th century by Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad of Qadian, Pakistan. His [century-old book](#), available on line, provides the basics of their evidence and understanding that Jesus survived the crucifixion. By now, their followers, several hundred thousand strong, are centered in London, Berlin and Los Angeles as well as in Pakistan. M. G. Ahmad carefully researched the traditions that support Jesus' trek across Asia; this prompted him and some scholarly followers to postulate how Jesus survived the crucifixion. Briefly, they posit that Jesus lapsed into a deep swoon while on the cross, that the spear thrust missed his heart, that he received medical attention while in the tomb, and that his exit from the tomb was aided by Essenes.² These are all plausible suppositions, except, it turns out, that Essenes were not in on it.

Underlying this and other survival hypotheses to be discussed is the knowledge that death on the cross was designed to be long in coming -- up to several days, while Jesus is said to have been taken down from the cross, with legs unbroken, relatively early on the same day. Further, it is often pointed out that Josephus has written of an instance in which he recognized three Jewish prisoners who had undergone crucifixion but had not yet died. He obtained permission from Titus to take them down from their crosses and administer aid; one of them survived.³ The Ahmadiyya literature also points out that the "sign of Jonah" prophecy made by Jesus is better fulfilled if he had survived the entombment of three days and nights, since Jonah survived his experience within the interior of the "big fish."

The Ahmadiyyas' supposition that Essenes were involved in Jesus' recovery stems from their assumption that the "angels in white" in Jn 20:12 or the men (or man) in white in Lk 24:4 (or Mt 28:3, Mk 16:5 or Jn 20:12) were Essenes due to the belief that Essenes wore white garments. Of course, this is not consistent with the reactions of the reported witnesses to having seen non-human entities clad in dazzlingly white apparel.

Karl Bahrdt, ca. 1780. This scholar postulated, in brief, that Jesus survived a feigned death, with Luke the physician having supplied drugs to Jesus beforehand. Jesus was supposed to have been an Essene, and so also Joseph of Arimathea, who resuscitated him. On the third day, when Jesus came forth, his appearance scared the guards away and he later lived in seclusion with the Essenes.⁴ Here there is much to criticize -- all, in fact, but the likelihood that Joseph of Arimathea was involved in Jesus' recovery.⁵

Karl Venturini, ca. 1800. Venturini proposed that Jesus had been associated with a secret society, which wished him to become a spiritual Messiah. Though they had not expected him to survive the crucifixion, one of them, dressed in white, heard some groans from inside the tomb. He frightened away the guards and retrieved Jesus, who used up his remaining energy in appearing to his disciples and afterwards retired permanently from sight. This appears even more far-fetched than Bahrdt's version.

Heinrich Paulus, 1828. A more detailed version was postulated by Paulus. Preceding the earthquake of Mt 27:51, dense fumes were supposedly released that caused difficulty in breathing and made it appear that Jesus had prematurely died on the cross. Somehow Jesus survived in the tomb without any help. Similar to Venturini's hypothesis, Paulus had Jesus use up his remaining energy in the following days and then disappear into an orographic cloud at the end of his final meeting with the disciples on the mountain -- the Ascension. Again, however, there is no shortage of problems with this scenario.⁶ Nevertheless, the father of modern theology, F.E.D. Schleiermacher, endorsed a form of this hypothesis in the early 1830s.⁷

Ernest Brougham Docker, 1920. He proposed that on the cross, Jesus had lapsed into a state of catalepsy or self-hypnosis, that the spear thrust to the side may not have occurred, and that within the tomb Jesus was aided by Joseph and Nicodemus. Later, the gardener of Jn 20:15 supplied Jesus with fresh clothing.⁸ Docker was a district court judge as well as a student of the New Testament, and offered an interesting discussion of how the bystanders at the crucifixion may have mistakenly thought Jesus dead while Joseph discovered otherwise. This scenario seems more realistic than the preceding ones, though surely Joseph or Nicodemus could have supplied the clothing.

Robert Graves & Joshua Podro, 1957. These two independent scholars pictured Jesus as having collapsed into a coma while on the cross, with the spear thrust having failed to pierce the lungs. The outflow of "blood and water" (Jn 19:34; Mt 27:49b, according to manuscripts "B" and "Aleph") indicated to them that Jesus had not died, a point also made by the Ahmadiyyas. One of the guards at the tomb is supposed to have entered in order to steal the valuable ointment smeared on the shroud in which Jesus had been wrapped; finding him alive, he informed their sergeant, who let Jesus go. That evening Jesus showed himself to the disciples, but from then on became a wanderer, living in hiding.⁹ I find this guard scenario much less realistic than that of secret medical attention supplied within the tomb.

The Talmud of Jmmanuel (TJ), 1978. This is the document discovered in 1963, translated in substantial part from Aramaic into German by 1974, and destroyed in June of that year due to its heresies for Christianity and Judaism.¹⁰ Because of its heresies, lack of extant originals, and association with a UFO contactee case, scholars cannot deal with it seriously and it remains largely unknown to them. In it, Jmmanuel (Jesus) lapses into a very deep trance, probably samadhi,¹¹ on the cross and only Joseph of Arimathea notices he is not dead after the spear thrust. (In its verses 30:49-51, the TJ says, "It came to pass that a soldier took his lance and stabbed Jmmanuel in his loin to ensure that he was dead. Blood mixed with water flowed from the wound as is the case when a person is dead or in a half-dead state. Thus the soldier thought that Jmmanuel was dead, and he informed the others.") After enshrouding him and carrying him to his tomb, he quickly seeks out Jmmanuel's Hindu friends for help because of their skill in medicines and herbs. They utilize a second entrance to the tomb known only to Joseph so as not to arouse suspicions, especially after the guards are posted. After three days (not just two) Jmmanuel is helped out very early in the morning via the secret entrance and continues to recover rapidly. Just how he was able to recover so quickly is not explained, and one is left with the possibility that his miraculous healing powers could be applied not just to others but to a considerable extent to himself as well. During his subsequent meetings with his disciples, he warned them not to disclose his survival to others. This may well be history, not hypothesis, but for those who insist that the TJ must be a literary hoax, it is the hypothesis of an unknown hoaxter.

J.D.M. Derrett, 1982. Prof. Derrett allowed that Jesus had lapsed into unconsciousness or a self-induced trance during the crucifixion, being taken for dead by bystanders and by the Roman soldier who stabbed him in the side. He chose the likelihood that his heart and lungs had not been pierced, and assumed that Jesus subsequently self-revived within the tomb. Basing other assumptions on the Gospel of Mark, he inferred that no Roman guard had been set, but rather that the young man of Mk 16:5 (and possibly of Mk 14:51) was a self-appointed guard. Some noise inside the tomb supposedly caused this guard to check inside, whence he found Jesus in poor shape but alive. Jesus is assumed to have muttered a few things to this guard to relay to the disciples, and died not long afterwards from his injuries. His disciples supposedly cremated his body because they considered him the Paschal Lamb, meant to be sacrificed.¹² A half dozen objections to this hypothesis have been raised.¹³

B. Thiering. This scholar pictured Jesus as having been given snake poison on the cross, which rendered him unconscious. He recovered from this and was helped to escape from the tomb by friends. Ultimately he settled in Rome.¹⁴ I have been unable to see any merit in her arguments: she pictures the entire ministry of Jesus as presented in the Gospels as actually having occurred in the Dead Sea area rather than the Sea-of-Galilee area, including the fishing industry. She regards nearly everything in the Gospels as a coded version of what actually occurred, with the code to be deciphered by the "pesher" method. Her use of this method makes repeated use of the Dead Sea Scrolls in which she interprets the "Wicked Priest" as Jesus. I am disappointed to have had to dismiss her work as summarily as have the "mainstream" scholars.

ATTEMPTED DEBUNKINGS

The resuscitation hypotheses up until 1835 were roundly rejected by David Friedrich Strauss, and for nearly a century this put a damper on further such hypotheses. His criticism was largely in the form of ridicule over the idea of a "half-dead" being creeping out from the grave "weak and ill," yet managing to instill in his disciples "the impression that he was a Conqueror over death and the grave."¹⁵ He assumed Jesus had not received any medical attention while in the tomb. However, several of the survival hypotheses do postulate such medical assistance, and are therefore immune to Strauss's objection. Yet, his rejection is sometimes referred to by scholars even today, when necessary, as if it were germane. Strauss was the first scholar to emphasize the possibility that after the crucifixion the disciples so longed for their Lord that they invented the appearances. Thus he simply dismissed all testimony that Jesus had risen from the grave and physically appeared to his disciples by pointing out inconsistencies in the various accounts, rather than exploring reasons why such inconsistencies would be expected.

A prominent medical-theological treatment of the crucifixion concluded that if Jesus did not die on the cross, he must surely have died from the spear thrust.¹⁶ However, this conclusion was based most noticeably on pre-1980 analyses of the Shroud of Turin and the assumption that this shroud is genuine. The Ahmadiyyas have also utilized the Shroud of Turin to support their opposing conclusion, but they could point to the outflow of "blood and water" from the spear thrust as indicating that Jesus had not died, as from asphyxiation, prior to that action. Although the authors of this attempted debunking were Christians, and must have believed in the reality of Jesus' miraculous cures of lepers, the lame, blind, deaf and other afflicted, they never questioned whether his spiritual healing power might not extend to his own body.

In summary, if the most logical components from the various resuscitation hypotheses are synthesized in a consistent manner, it is seen that one like the T.J.'s story could emerge that survives the objections of attempted debunkers. This is especially true if Jesus' healing powers could have applied also to himself. This may seem more plausible to many than that the Gospels' stories of Jesus' post-crucifixion appearances were totally made up and that resurrection is a viable concept. Hence it is reasonable to treat seriously the traditions indicating that in years following the crucifixion, Jesus and a small party traveled about Anatolia and western Asia.

Some of these Jesus-in-Asia traditions to be presented have been pseudo-debunked by the Swedish scholar, Per Beskow.¹⁷ Careful inspection of one topic, however, indicates that his tactic was to ignore the most pertinent pieces of evidence, distort much of the rest, emphasize irrelevancies, attempt to discredit persons who provide first- or second-hand information, and otherwise treat the evidence piece-meal rather than cumulatively.¹⁸ Beskow dismissed the Jesus-in-Asia traditions primarily by calling them legends whose Asian sources "do not carry any weight at all."¹⁹ This appears to be a cultural put-down induced by theological commitment or fear that serious investigation of the topic would be loathsome in the eyes of Western colleagues.

TRADITIONS OF JESUS' TRAVELS AFTER THE CRUCIFIXION

Jesus within Islam. Certain Islamic historians felt no need to suppress these traditions, since to them Jesus was only a mortal prophet, albeit a very important one. Moreover, Islam in general doesn't even believe that Jesus underwent the crucifixion, but that someone substituted for him on the cross. The Persian historian Mir Kawand names a site close to Damascus called Maqam-Isa or Mayuam-i-isa, which means "the place where Jesus lived," according to independent scholar Holger Kersten.²⁰ Kersten traveled through western Asia in 1973-74 visiting various libraries and researching these traditions. The *Talmud of Jmmanuel* confirms this by indicating that Jmmanuel (alias Jesus) went to Damascus following his final meeting with his disciples, and lived there incognito for two years.²¹ This included the time when Saul (Paul) had his conversion experience on the road to Damascus southwest of the city.²²

Three of these historians wrote of Jesus, Mary and Thomas (Judas-Thomas, presumably) having traveled to Nisibis (Nasibain) near Edessa, now Urfa in southeast Turkey just north of Syria, where Jesus preached to the king. Mir Muhammad bin Khawand Shah Ibn-i-Muhammad, also known as Mir Khawand bin Badshah, in 1417 wrote of the journey of Jesus away from the Jerusalem area to Nisibis. In the former, Jesus and Mary first go to Syria; in the latter, they and Thomas have some confrontations with the king of Nisibis.²³

Faqir Muhammad, around 1830, wrote, among other things, that on these journeys Jesus and Mary traveled on foot, and that Jesus preached to the king of Nisibis.²⁴ According to Holger Kersten, the story is prefixed by this king having been ill and having requested Jesus to come and cure him; Jesus sent Thomas on ahead, and Thomas cured the king by the time Jesus and the rest of his party arrived.²⁵

Iman Abu Jaffar Muhammad bin Jarir at-Tabri in 1880 wrote of the tradition that Jesus and party had to depart quickly from Nisibis because of hostility that had arisen against them there. [26](#)

In some Muslim writings Jesus is referred to as Yuz Asaf. The meaning and derivation of the name is uncertain. "Yuz" is thought by some to mean either "Jesus" or "leader," and "Asaf" to refer to those he cured of leprosy. Thus one interpretation is that Yuz Asaf means "leader of those he cured of leprosy."[27](#) An alternate interpretation will be supplied later. It is understandable that in his travels after the crucifixion Jesus would have remained incognito, especially for the first few years and in Anatolia, and when necessary have supplied a name for himself other than what he had been known by in Palestine. However, ample descriptions are supplied that leave little room to doubt that the man known as Yuz Asaf is to be identified with Jesus -- his close association with his mother Mary and with Thomas is one of these.

In Iranian traditions recounted by Agha Mustafai, it is said that Yuz Asaf came there from the west and preached, causing many to believe in him.[28](#) His teachings are said to have been similar to those of Jesus. However, if he had taught reincarnation, [29](#) one would not expect that his surmised teachings on that subject would have been carried along by Muslim writers any more than by Christian writers, since Islam also does not embrace the concept of reincarnation.

Within northwest Afghanistan, centered in the city of Herat, an explorer of Sufism, O. M. Burke, came across a sect of some 1000 people who are devotees of Yuz Asaf, whom they also knew as Isa, son of Maryam.[30](#) Their tradition includes Isa, the prophet from Israel, having escaped the cross, traveled to India and settled in Kashmir. He was (again) regarded as possessing the power to perform miracles. The sect's leader at that time (1976), Abba Yahiyya (Father John), could recite the names of the succession of their leaders and teachers back through nearly 60 generations to Yuz Asaf himself, when he had stopped off there along the Silk Road. Although Burke referred to this sect as Christians, since they revere Isa as the Son of God, they cannot of course be considered Christian in any orthodox sense.

Within the Holy Quran there are many verses discussing Jesus, and often Mary also, but these either deal with the Nativity or his Palestinian ministry, or contain no definite geographical and temporal context. A possible exception, however, is Surah 23:50, a translation of which reads:

And We made the son of Marium [Mary] and his mother a sign, and We gave them a shelter on a lofty ground having meadows and springs.

Since Israel is not noted for having lofty ground with meadows and springs, this verse suggests a different location, and if shelter was needed, it indicates they were traveling.

In eastern Pakistan, next to Kashmir, there is further support for these traditions. There one may find the tomb of Mary on a hilltop just outside a small town called Murree or Mari. The grave is called *Mai Mari da Asthan*, which means "the final resting place of Mother Mary."[31](#) Her tomb faces east-west, as in Jewish custom, rather than north-south as in Islamic custom. Thus some evidence does exist to indicate that Mary made it at least this far in their travels and had traversed with Jesus over much beautiful high country of Afghanistan and Pakistan, in support of the Quran verse that hints at this.

Farther east, in Kashmir near Srinagar, there is a monument in stone: the Throne of Solomon, bearing four inscriptions, the last two of which are most interesting though they were mutilated following the conquest of Kashmir by the Sikhs in 1819. However, they were described by the early Muslim historian of Kashmir, Mulla Nadiri, in 1413. An English translation of his Persian script is:

At this time Yuz Asaf proclaimed his prophethood. Year fifty and four [in the reign of King Gopadatta].

and

He is Jesus, prophet of the Children of Israel.[32](#)

The correct dating and significance of the year 54 is not clear. The year has been placed within the reign of King Gopadatta at 107 C.E. by Kersten, and at 78 C.E. by Professor Fida Hassnain, director of archives and antiquities in Kashmir.[33](#)

Some written and oral tradition assert that after death Yuz Asaf was entombed in the old section of Srinagar, in Anzimar in the Khanjar (or Khaniyar) quarter.[34](#) Tradition has it that the tomb, about which a small building was long ago constructed, has been under constant watch by a succession of guardians ever since Yuz Asaf's supposed burial there. On the floor next to his grave it was noted by Hassnain that much candle-wax had accumulated, and upon carefully scraping it away at one corner of the tombstone, he discovered a crucifix and a rosary that had long been embedded. In addition, he found two footprints carved into the stone underneath the candle wax and mud with the marking of a crucifixion scar etched into each print.[35](#) This is further indication that Yuz Asaf was known to have been Jesus Christ. Each year hundreds of Muslims, Christians, Hindus and Buddhists visit the tomb (known as Rozabal, or the "sacred tomb") to pay homage -- a nearly unique example of a unity within world religions.

There is a report, however, that Yuz Asaf was actually buried not at the noted tomb site in Srinagar's old town, but on a hillside not far away. This comes from the UFO contactee Eduard Meier, the co-discoverer and editor of the *Talmud of Jmmanuel*, who in turn received the information from one of his contacting extraterrestrials. Those who have studied this document and realize its genuineness may wish to treat this report seriously.

Within the ruins of the Indian city of Fatehpur Sikri, located some 15 miles west of Agra, there is an interesting inscription on a wall. It was emplaced on the portal of a mosque around 1601 by the emperor Akbar the Great, a Muslim convert of sorts, and reads,

So said Jesus on whom be peace! The world is a bridge; pass over it but build no house upon it.[36](#)

The meaning seems to be to keep in mind that the permanent home of the human spirit is not of this world, but with the Universal Consciousness, or God. Since the saying is not in the Gospels, it is consistent with having been uttered by Yuz Asaf. Its spiritual nature is fully consistent with the content of the previously mentioned *Talmud of Jmmanuel*. Possibly, verse 42 of the Gospel of Thomas is based upon this saying, for it reads, "Become passers-by" or "Become, as you pass by."

It may be speculated that one of those who accompanied Yuz Asaf alias Jesus on his travels was a disciple-writer who continued to document Jesus' experiences and ministry until his own death, after which the writings ceased or were taken over by another until Jesus' death. If so, Jesus may have made provision for someone to carry a copy of the writings back on the Silk Road to the Palestinian area soon after his death, where it eventually came into the custody of the compiler of the Gospel of Matthew.[37](#) This then would have been the source that Bishop Papias had learned about and referred to as the *Logia*, and the reason for the Gospels having come into existence relatively late.[38](#) A supportive legend behind this speculation comes from the mention by Eusebius that the well known Alexandrian, Pantaenus (late second century), reported that during his trip to India he had learned that one of the twelve apostles had earlier preached there to the Indians from a Hebraic writing identified as the Gospel of Matthew.[39](#) Since the Gospels as they became known by mid-2nd century had not yet been created while any apostles were still alive, this suggests that the preaching Pantaenus reported had come from a pre-Matthean source written in India -- the *Logia*. The early parts of these *Logia* would have resembled the Gospel of Matthew.[40](#)

The first Muslim writer known to have included the tradition of Jesus having traveled to India in his youth with the tradition that he, as Yuz Asaf, had traveled in southwest Asia in the latter half of the first century, was the 10th-century historian, Shaikh Al-Said.[41](#)

Jesus within Hinduism. The Hindu literature known as the *Bhavishya Maha Purana* contains some ten verses indicating that Jesus was in India/Kashmir during the reign of King Shalivahan, which has been placed within 39 to 50 C.E. The king is said to have

encountered Jesus at a spot about 10 miles northeast of Srinagar where there is a sulfur spring.⁴² During the king's inquiries of who he was, Jesus is reported to have replied that he was Yusashaphat (interpreted as Yuz Asaf by K. N. Ahmad), and that he had become known as Isa Masih (Jesus the Messiah). K. N. Ahmad dates the writing of these verses to 115 C.E. Although details of the verses may indicate that they received later editing, their basic theme – that Christianity's Jesus had been there in Kashmir – persists.

Much more recent is a statement by Jawarhar Nehru in a 1932 letter to his daughter, Indira, where he wrote, "All over Central Asia, in Kashmir and Ladakh and Tibet and even farther north, there is a strong belief that Jesus or Isa travelled about there. Some people believed that he visited India also."⁴³ This testifies to the persistence of the oral tradition.

Jesus within Buddhism. It has been suggested that within Mahayana Buddhism the legendary Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara developed out of Jesus having been in Tibet and India.⁴⁴ For one reason, this bodhisattva is thought to have reached his earliest known (legendary) form around the second or third century C.E.,⁴⁵ which timing is appropriate for the hypothesis. For another reason, the book by Professor John Holt of Bowdoin College, Brunswick, Maine, suggests that the origins of the Avalokitesvara cult was in northwest India in the second century.⁴⁶

Although Avalokitesvara is mentioned in the Buddhist writing called the *Heart Sutra*, that writing, according to Holt (personal communication), is a "prajnaparamita" text that probably dates to either the 1st or 2nd century CE and is therefore somewhat later than the more likely origins of Avalokitesvara. The name itself, however, may stem from "avalokana," an abstracted mythologization of the compassionate view of the world that the Buddha takes just after his enlightenment experience.

For still another reason, given the impact that Jesus made in just a couple years of ministry in Palestine, due in no small measure to his ability to work miracles and prophesy, it would not be surprising that his further ministry during many post-crucifixion years of traveling outside of Palestine under different names would also have received acclaim, at least within oral tradition. The Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara is a candidate for this because he became the top one or two of all the numerous bodhisattvas in importance and degree of respect and worship accorded.⁴⁷ Within Buddhist thought, the successive Dalai Lamas are believed to be reincarnations of Avalokitesvara.

However, the primary reason is that he is sometimes portrayed with a small circular marking on the hand, which could represent a crucifixion scar.⁴⁸ A similar marking, usually interpreted as the Buddhist wheel of life, is mentioned in a third-century writing to be imprinted upon the soles of his feet.⁴⁹

The mythologization of Avalokitesvara became so extensive that he has even been considered the creator of the world.⁵⁰ This is surprisingly similar to Jesus being professed as part of the Godhead who was with God the Creator from the beginning. If both creation stories are considered to be myths, however, it is not surprising that the same man could have inspired both.

If Avalokitesvara should indeed be another name for Jesus, it is an example of a legend as yet known to only a few. But if it was known to be more than just a legend to some Buddhists at the time the name Avalokitesvara was bestowed, it is understandable that they would not wish to antagonize Christians by insisting Buddhism call him by the same name that Christianity uses.

Kersten has advanced the idea that the name Yuz Asaf may actually have a Buddhist derivation. If Jesus had called himself a knower of truth, or others had recognized this, then in Sanskrit this phrase would be "bodhi sattva," or "budasaf" essentially, Kersten suggests.⁵¹ He pointed out that in Syrian, Arabic and Persian, "Budasaf" would read like "Judasaf" or "Yudasaf," since their letters J and B are nearly identical. The latter two words are sufficiently similar, then, that this could be the real etymology behind "Yuz Asaf."

The tradition that Jesus, under whatever name, had been to the Kashmir region in years after the crucifixion is known to some of the lamas. In 1922 Swami Abhedananda, a well known monk and disciple of Sri Ramakrishna of the Barahanagar Temple, near Calcutta, learned of this from a lama at Himis monastery, Ladakh.⁵²

Jesus within Roman paganism. It is only natural to inquire if a similar legend might not exist within Roman paganism that would point back to Jesus as having been its source. There is indeed such a legend -- the man known as Apollonius of Tyana, but he was more than a legend. He is supposed to have been born around the commencement of the Christian era and to have died in 97 C.E. His life is described within a biography written in Rome by the Greek philosopher, Philostratus, around 220 C.E.⁵³ If the many other traditions that collectively indicate Jesus had spent years traveling after the crucifixion contain truth, it would not be surprising that he would sometimes have been confronted by a Roman official and, to be safe, would have needed to supply himself with an alias. A Greek name with pagan overtones -- Apollonius -- would of course have made it easier for him to travel within Anatolia and elsewhere within the Roman empire.

In his biography Philostratus credits Apollonius with the same kinds of powers that the Gospels depict for Jesus: healing, casting out of spirits, and foreknowledge. One of his healings was particularly suggestive, where he brought a girl back to life who had recently died, very much as with the daughter of Jairus in Matthew 9:23-25. And at one point Philostratus went so far as to allude that Apollonius would actually be alive when his followers would instead think he had risen from the dead.⁵⁴ The *parallels* between the life and character of Apollonius and those of Jesus are much too numerous to ignore.

This connection between Apollonius and Jesus did not go unnoticed by influential Christians. Eusebius knew of it, and denounced those who wrote favorably about this Apollonius.⁵⁵ Fortunately, however, Philostratus's biography managed to survive, though an antecedent's books about Apollonius did not.⁵⁶ It would seem that Philostratus had taken care to ensure in his book that any connection between Apollonius and Jesus would be indirect and not too apparent. For example, he never mentioned Apollonius as residing in, or traveling to, the land of Israel.

On his journeys Apollonius is said to have been accompanied not only by his primary companion, Damis, but by "two servants he had inherited" -- one a shorthand writer and the other a secretary.⁵⁷ These two could easily correspond to Jesus' disciple-writer and to his mother, respectively. Damis would then correspond to Judas-Thomas, and we may note a similarity between Thomas's Greek name "Didymus" and "Damis."

On one trip Apollonius and his party travel to Babylon, where the king had fallen ill. Apollonius attends him and brings about his recovery.⁵⁸ This story is somewhat reminiscent of Faqir Muhammad's account of Thomas having cured the king of Nisibis, if allowance is made for Philostratus to have altered the geographical location.

On a longer trip eastward to Taxila (in Pakistan) Apollonius and his party are said to have visited King Gundaphorus for several days.⁵⁹ That visit is reminiscent of one to the same king reported in the *Acts of Thomas*.⁶⁰ However, Philostratus found much to say about Apollonius and Damis there while in the *Acts of Thomas* Jesus only puts in fleeting appearances at King Gundaphorus's court, as if its writer knew that were he to write anything further it would target his Gnostic document for oblivion by defenders of Christianity.

Analysts have had great difficulty with the biography of Apollonius in trying to determine which parts are historical and which are fiction. However, Apollonius himself was definitely a historical figure:

- (a) four books by one Moeragnes that did not survive were written about him and mentioned by Origen;
- (b) Apollonius is mentioned by the Greek rhetorician Lucian; and
- (c) the historian Cassius Dio mentions him twice in contexts of having been a real figure.⁶¹

Just how and where Apollonius of Tyana died is left vague by Philostratus. He has no known tomb or burial site, despite his historical importance, which is consistent with his name being a pseudonym and/or his burial place being outside of the Roman empire.

There is an [Apollonius website](#) devoted entirely to this man and the problem he posed for early Christianity.

The tradition relayed by Irenaeus. Besides the clues within the Gospels of the empty tomb and post-entombment appearances,

which are consistent with Jesus later having had an extended ministry outside of Palestine, a tradition consistent with this was made known by a prominent church father. Irenaeus, who lived until about 180 C.E., and who was a staunch quasher of heresies, nevertheless attested to a tradition that elders of the church who were conversant with the disciple John in Asia had affirmed that Jesus had reached old age -- beyond 50.⁶² The crux of it reads as follows:

On completing His thirtieth year He suffered, being in fact still a young man, and who had by no means attained to advanced age. Now, that the first stage of early life embraces thirty years, and that this extends onwards to the fortieth year, every one will admit; but from the fortieth and fiftieth year a man begins to decline towards old age, which our Lord possessed while He still fulfilled the office of a Teacher, even as the Gospel and all the elders testify; those who were conversant in Asia with John, the disciple of the Lord [affirming] that John conveyed to them that information. And he remained among them up to the time of Trajan. Some of them, moreover, saw not only John, but the other apostles also, and heard the very same account as to the [validity of] the statement.

"The statement" or "information" evidently is the assertion that Jesus had reached the stage of old age and was still teaching, and was no longer the young 30 he had been at the crucifixion (suffering). The clause "even as the Gospel and all the elders testify" reads like a scribal addition that attempts to explain this away in reference to Jn 8:56, which strangely implies that Jesus, during his Palestinian ministry, was nearing the age of 50. The preceding paragraph, not reproduced here, also reads like a scribal addition designed to ameliorate the impact of the above statement; it talks of Jesus, during his ministry, being of all ages, and taking on the age of each person who was listening to him.

It is not known how Irenaeus assimilated this information into his belief in the resurrection. The editors of *Ante-Nicene Fathers* called it an "extraordinary assertion," but could only imply that Irenaeus had somehow been grossly in error. It should be clear that if the statement had merely involved the fact that Jesus had been a teacher for one, two or three years until the day he was crucified, this is not anything Irenaeus would have bothered to report, as Christians already knew that. The mention of Asia in the above report probably refers to Asia Minor, or Anatolia.

SUMMARY

Many of the foregoing legends and traditions may be unfamiliar to the reader because they *have* been systematically ignored and suppressed in the West. However, when they are viewed together as a whole, we see a very consistent picture that is trying to tell us that Christianity at a very early stage was directed onto the wrong path, first by Paul and then by the early churches which Paul so heavily influenced. The right path instead tells us much more of just how remarkable this man, known to us today as Jesus, actually was. This is not to say that some fraction of the strange tales one may read about Jesus are not fictions, but to say that a holistic perception is needed to separate probable fact from probable fiction. The practice of assuming that any tradition is false if it conflicts with one's own particular theological commitment, without having first carefully examined it with a truly open mind and in a comprehensive manner, cannot be condoned within true scholarship or true science.

ENDNOTES

1. See, e.g., Hugh J. Schonfield, *The Passover Plot* (London: Hutchinson, 1966); Donovan Joyce, *The Jesus Scroll* (Melbourne, Australia: Ferret Books, 1972); and Michael Baigent, Richard Leigh and Henry Lincoln, *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* (New York: Harper and Row, 1983) 357.
2. See Khwaja Nazir Ahmad, *Jesus in Heaven on Earth*, (Woking, England: Woking Muslim Mission & Literary Trust, 1952) 196-199. See also several relevant articles in *Truth about the Crucifixion* (London: The London Mosque, 1978).
3. See, for example, David Friedrich Strauss, *A NewLife of Jesus*, vol. 1, 2nd Ed. (London: Williams and Norgate, 1879) 410-411.
4. See William Lane Craig, *The Historical Argument for the Resurrection of Jesus during the Deist Controversy* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1985) 392-393.
5. James W. Deardorff, *Jesus in India* (Bethesda, MD, International Scholars Publications (University Press of America), 1994) 138-139.
6. *Ibid.*,140-141.
7. Craig, *Historical Argument*, 400. See also Karl Barth, *The Theology of Schleiermacher*, ed. D. Ritschl, transl. G. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982) 101-102.
8. E. B. Docker, *If Jesus Did Not Die on the Cross: A Study of the Evidence* (London: Robert Scott, 1920), 20-21, 32-33, 49.
9. R. Graves and J. Podro, *Jesus in Rome* (London: Cassell & Co., 1957) 12-13. Much of the book is devoted to the possibility that Jesus traveled to Rome after the crucifixion, which I find to be based on only one very shaky bit of evidence.
10. *Talmud Jmmanuel*, ed. Eduard A. Meier (Schmidrüti, Switzerland: 1978). See also the present web site: <http://www.tjresearch.info>.
11. Samadhi is a trance-state of meditation whose deepest form is the same as being "out-of-body." According to Janet Lee Mitchell, *Out of Body Experiences: A Handbook* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1981) either exhaustion, a life-threatening situation or the purposeful intent of an experienced practitioner can induce it. In this state, no pain inflicted upon the body is felt, not even from a spear thrust, and it is not surprising that both the soldiers involved in the crucifixion and the bystanders would have mistakenly thought Jmmanuel was dead. Even one of the Gospels indicates that this sort of thing can happen (Mk 9:26): the onlookers of Jesus' healing of the paroxysmic boy thought he was dead after he had become "like a corpse," until Jesus took his hand.
- Samadhi is known within Hinduism and Buddhism, and Jesus would likely have learned how to access this state if the "lost years" of his youth had been spent in India. See Deardorff, *Jesus in India*, 101-134; and Elizabeth Clare Prophet, *The Lost Years of Jesus* (Livingston, MT: Summit University Press, 1984). The TJ briefly indicates that Jmmanuel (Jesus) had indeed been to India during his youth, had learned much from the Masters there, and had acquired Hindu friends during or after his return.
12. J.D.M. Derrett, *The Anastasis: The Resurrection of Jesus as an Historical Event* (Shipston-on-Stour, England: P. Drinkwater, 1982).
13. Deardorff, *Jesus in India*, 148.
14. Barbara Thiering, *Jesus and the Riddle of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992), 116.
15. Strauss, *NewLife of Jesus*, vol. 1, 412.
16. W. D. Edwards, Wesley J. Gabel, and Floyd E. Hosmer, "On the physical death of Jesus," *J. American Medical Assn.* 255 (1986) 1455-1463.
17. Per Beskow, *Strange Tales about Jesus: A Survey of Unfamiliar Gospels* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985).
18. Deardorff, *Jesus in India*, 112-134.

19. Beskow, *Strange Tales*, 8.

20. Holger Kersten, *Jesus Lived in India*, transl. T. Woods-Czisch (Longmead, Shaftesbury, Dorset, England: Element Book, 1986) 177-178.

21. *The Talmud of Jmmanuel*, Eduard Meier, ed. (Mill Spring, NC: Wild Flower Press, 2001) 237.

22. This links to <http://www.tjresearch.info/paulconv.htm>.

23. Mir Khawand bin Badshah, *Rauza-tus-Safa (The Gardens of Purity)* (Bombay: reprinted in 1852) vol. 1 of 7, 132-136. See also the secondary source: K. N. Ahmad, *Jesus in Heaven on Earth*, 358, 404.

24. *Jami-ut-Tavarikh*, vol. 2 (1836) p. 81.

25. Kersten, *Jesus Lived in India*, 179. This story may lie at the root of the legend of the letter from Jesus to Abgarus, king of Edessa, known to Eusebius in *EH* 1.13.

26. Abu Jaffar Muhammad bin Jarir at-Tabri, *Tafsir Ibn-i-Jarir at-Tabri (Jami al Bayan fi Tafsir-ul-Qur'an)* (Cairo: Kubr-ul-Mar'a Press, 1880) vol. 3, p. 197. See also K. N. Ahmad, *Jesus in Heaven on Earth*, 359, 392.

27. K. N. Ahmad, *Jesus in Heaven on Earth*, 359-360. See also Peter James, "Did Christ die in Kashmir?" *Islamic Rev.* 3 (Oct./Nov., 1983) 17.

28. Agha Mustafai, *Ahwali Ahalian-i-Paras* (Tehran:1868) 219. See K. N. Ahmad, *Jesus in Heaven on Earth*, 360, 404.

29. See Deardorff, *Jesus in India*, 22-35. There the evidence is presented indicating that Jesus had actually taught reincarnation, not resurrection.

30. Omar Michael Burke, *Among the Dervishes* (London: Octagon Press, 1976), 107.

31. Kersten, *Jesus Lived in India*, 186.

32. Mulla Nadir, *Tarikh-i-Kashmir* (1413 manuscript in possession of Ghulam Mohy-ud-Din Wanchu, Srinagar) 69. See K. N. Ahmad, *Jesus in Heaven on Earth*, 369-370, 400. "Children of Israel" here refers to the Bani-Israel, those numerous residents of Kashmir, northern India and Afghanistan whose characteristics and culture appear to have derived from Semitic ancestry. Several researchers conclude that they represent parts of the ten lost tribes of ancient Israel; e.g., see George Moore, *The Lost Tribes* (London: Longman Green, 1861).

33. Kersten, *Jesus Lived in India*, 200; Fida Hassnain, *A Search for the Historical Jesus* (Bath, England: Gateway Books, 1994) 201-203.

34. Abu Muhammad Haji Mohyud-Din, *Tarikh-i-Kabir-i-Kashmir* (Amritsar, India: Suraj Parkash Press, 1903) 34-35. See also K. N. Ahmad, *Jesus in Heaven on Earth*, 373-374, 399.

35. Kersten, *Jesus Lived in India*, 208-209; Hassnain, *Search for the Historical Jesus* 173-181.

36. Vincent A. Smith, *Akbar the Great Mogul, 1542-1605* (Delhi: S. Chand, 1966) 200.

37. This is consistent with the TJ's story, where the courier of the documents or scrolls is reported to have been one of Jesus' sons. It is also consistent with the legend that Jesus finally married an Indian or Kashmiri woman who bore him several children as mentioned by James, "Did Christ Die in Kashmir?" 17, and Hassnain, *Search for the Historical Jesus*, 198.

38. See Deardorff, *The Problems of New Testament Gospel Origins* (New York: Mellen Press, 1992) 9-22.

39. Eusebius, *EH* 5.10.2-4.

40. The *Talmud of Jmmanuel*, or TJ, is evidently a candidate to have been these *Logia*.

41. Shaikh A-Said-us-Sadiq, *Kamal-ud-Din* (Iran:Syed-us-Sanad Press, 1782) 357-358. See K. N. Ahmad, *Jesus in Heaven on Earth*, 365-366.

42. Pandit Sutta, *Bhavishya Maha Puranan*, 3.3.17-31 (Bombay: Venkateshvaria Press, 1917) 282. See also Kersten, *Jesus Lived in India*, 195-196; and K. N. Ahmad, *Jesus in Heaven on Earth*, 369.

43. Jawarhar Lal Nehru, *Glimpses of World History* (New York: John Day Co., 1942), 84.

44. Kersten, *Jesus Lived in India*, 204.

45. John Blofield, *Compassion Yoga* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1977) 22; Sir Monier Monier-Williams, *Buddhism* (London: John Murray, 1890) 195-196.

46. John Clifford Holt, *Buddha in the Crown* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991) 53, 55.

47. Donald S. Lopez and Steven C. Rockefeller, eds., *The Christ and the Bodhisattva* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1987) 28-29.

48. Deardorff, *Jesus in India*, 260. Although modern scholars suppose that the Romans would have known to drive the crucifixion nails through the lower wrists rather than through the hands, to better support the body on the cross, we have no reason to believe that victims in that area had previously been crucified other than by having their hands and wrists (and feet) strapped rather than nailed. Hence, if using nails for the first time there, the Romans soldiers may very well have targeted Jesus' hands, not wrists, not knowing any better. In any event, the executioners were not in the business of being humane.

49. Holt, *Buddha in the Crown*, 35. See also Kersten, *Jesus Lived in India*, 204.

50. Edward J. Thomas, *The History of Buddhist Thought*, 2nd Ed. (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1951) 190-191.

51. Kersten, *Jesus Lived in India*, 203-204.

52. Abhedaananda, *Swami Abhedaananda's Journey into Kashmir and Tibet* (Calcutta: Ramakrishna Vedanta Math, 1987; also available from Vedanta Press, Hollywood, CA), 121.

53. Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius*, G. W. Bowersock, ed., C. P. Jones, transl. (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1970).

54. Ibid., 197. In the passage in question, it appears certain to Damis, Apollonius' closest follower, that his master would soon be executed by Nero. But Apollonius instructs Damis to "Walk by the sea where the isle of Calypso is, because I will appear before your

eyes there.' 'Alive,' asked Damis, 'or how?' Apollonius laughed and said, 'To my way of thinking, alive, but to yours, risen from the dead.'"

55. Eusebius, "Against Apollonius of Tyana by Philostratus," in *The Life of Apollonius of Tyana, the Epistles of Apollonius and the Treatise of Eusebius*, F. C. Conybeare, ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1912) vol. 2, 485-605.

56. Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius*, 13. This earlier, late 2nd-century author was Moeragnes, who had written four books about Apollonius, none of which survived.

57. *Ibid.*, 44.

58. *Ibid.*, 51.

59. *Ibid.*, 57-67.

60. See *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 8, 541-542.

61. Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius*, 10-12.

62. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, book. 2, chap. 22, paragraph 5, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1, 392.

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